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England - Churches, &c. Baptist 572

The **KENT and SUSSEX**

ASSOCIATION OF *Particular*

BAPTIST CHURCHES,

CONSISTING of those which meet at *Ashford, Sandhurst, Smarden, Tenterden, and Folkstone*, in KENT ; and at *Battle, Rye, Wivelsfield, Lewes, and Bright-helmston*, in SUSSEX.

MAINTAINING the important Doctrines of Three equal Persons in the Divine Essence—Eternal, and Personal Election to Holiness here, and eternal Life hereafter—The original Guilt and Depravity of Mankind—Particular Redemption—Free Justification, by the imputed Righteousness of Christ alone—Effecacious Grace in Regeneration, and the perseverance of the Saints to eternal Glory.]

ASSEMBLED AT RYE,

The 15th and 16th Days of June, 1791.

B R E V I A T E S.

ALL the Messengers of the Churches met at three o'clock in the Meeting-house, and Brother *Vine* begun in prayer ; and after singing *Psalms cxxxiii. C. M.* Brother *Vidler* preached from *Rom. iii. 21.* in the room of Brother *Lloyd*, who did not attend ; then the 94th *Hymn of Watts's first Book* was sung, and Brother *Middleton* concluded this service in prayer.

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The names of the Messengers were then called over :—Brother *Vidler* chosen the Moderator, and Brother *Scott* the Scribe. The Preliminaries of the Association were read, and also the Letters of the respective Churches in this connection ; after which, Brother *Vidler* prayed, and then adjourned the Assembly at half past five o'clock.

The Messengers met, pursuant to adjournment, at seven o'clock, and Brother *Espenett* began in prayer.

A letter was read from the Church at *Rotherfield*, desiring to be restored as a branch of the Association, and it was restored accordingly.

The *Rotherfield* begging-case was thought worthy of recommendation to those churches which have not yet contributed to it.

Messengers from the Church at *Bessell's Green* presented a letter agreeable to the request of the last year, desiring to become a branch of our Association, and that Church was accordingly received.

The Brethren *Purdy*, *Copping*, and *Middleton* were appointed to constitute a Committee of Correspondence.

A Letter from the *Charlston Association in America*, was read, and referred to the above Committee.

Brother *Slanger* prayed, and the Moderator adjourned the Assembly at nine o'clock.

The Messengers met, pursuant to adjournment, at six o'clock on Thursday morning.

The Brethren *Coe*, *Kennett*, and *Burt* prayed.

The *Circular Letter*, which was drawn up by Brother *Lloyd*, was read, approved, and ordered to be printed, for the use of the Churches.

The Brethren *Purdy*, *Copping*, and *Middleton* were appointed to inspect, correct, and superintend the printing of Circular Letters.

Brother

Brother *Purdy* read a plan for an *Association-Fund*, which was referred to the Committee of Correspondence, to be communicated to the Churches.

Brother *Vidler* prayed, and adjourned the Assembly at half past eight o'clock.

Public worship began at ten o'clock, and was conducted in the following order: Sung, *Watts* Book ii. Hymn 69—Brother *Arwood* prayed—Sung, *Rippon*, Hymn 366—Brother *Wake* preached from *Amos*, iii. 6—Sung, *Rippon*, 9—Brother *John Davis* of Waltham Abbey, prayed—Sung, *Watts* i. 138. Brother *Copping* preached from *Isa*, liv. 2—Sung, *Rippon*, 426—Brother *Middleton* concluded in prayer.

Adjourned at half past one o'clock.

The Messengers met again at four o'clock.

All the Churches in this connection, were desired to communicate their sentiments on the subject of the *Association-Fund*, by their Messengers, at the next meeting.

It was agreed that the Moderator should sign the *Association-Book*, in the name, and on the behalf of the whole Assembly.

It was agreed to recommend the first Wednesday in November next, as a day of Fasting and Prayer, to all the Churches.

It was agreed to print the state of the Churches distinctly, and particularly, as the American Brethren do.

It was agreed, that in future, the Messengers of the Churches, do meet by themselves at the Inn.

It was agreed that the next Association be held at *Brightelmston* in *Suffex*, the first Tuesday and Wednesday in June, 1792.

It was agreed that Brother *Purdy* should draw up the next Circular Letter, and that one of the following questions be recommended to his attention, as the subject of it, viz. 1. *What are the best evidences of*

the grace of God in a believer's heart ? 2. What is the scriptural view of the covenants of Works and Grace ?

Brother *Lloyd* was appointed to preach on the Tuesday evening ; and Brother *Stanger* on Wednesday ; and, in case of failure, Brother *Atwood* and Brother *Wake*.

Put up at the *King and Queen*, in North Row.

The Moderator concluded in prayer.

* Brother *Thomas Davis* of *Reading*, preached a Sermon in the evening, from *Pf. li. 2.*

The

The State of the Associated Churches of Kent and Suffex,

1791.

[Ministers' names are in *Italic.*]

CHURCHES.	MESSENGERS.	Addition.			Diminution.			
		bpt.	lett.	ref.	dsm	exc	dead	nb.
ASHFORD, -	John Scott, -	1					1	
BATTLE, -	{ <i>William Vidler,</i> <i>William Ashby,</i>	16	4		1	2	1	
FOLKSTONE, -	{ <i>William Atwood,</i> <i>William Kennett,</i> <i>William Mills,</i>	1				2	1	
RYE, -	{ <i>Thomas Purdy,</i> <i>John Cook,</i> <i>John Lawrence,</i>		1	1		1		
LEWES, -	{ <i>Joseph Middleton,</i> <i>David Gilbert,</i> <i>Matthew Hunter,</i>					4	1	
SANDHURST, -	{ <i>William Copping,</i> <i>Samuel Burt,</i> <i>Joseph Fowle,</i>	1						
SMARDEN, -	<i>Thomas Wake,</i> -	3	1		2	2	2	
TENTERDEN, -	{ <i>Samuel Espenett,</i> <i>Thomas Tamkin,</i>	1			1	2	3	
WIVELSFIELD, -	<i>Henry Booker,</i> -	19					2	
BRIGHTHELMSTON,	<i>Thomas Vine,</i> -	5				1		
BESSELL's GREEN, -	{ <i>John Stanger;</i> <i>Joseph Fletcher,</i>							27
ROTHERFIELD, -	<i>William Coe,</i> -							
		47	2	5	4	14	11	

Increase 25.

The

The CIRCULAR LETTER.

The *Pastors, Ministers, and Messengers*, to the several Churches which they represent, send Christian salutation.

Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling !

THE gracious and merciful providence of our covenant God, having brought us together once more, as ministers and messengers of the respective churches, whom we have the honor to represent ; we think it our duty to use every method, that may conduce to your spiritual profit and edification ; and as the discussion of some particular question or doctrine in divinity has been thought expedient on these occasions, the doctrine that now calls for your attention, is that of *ADOPTION* : a doctrine of infinite importance to the comfort, and establishment of the children of God, if rightly understood. It cannot however, be expected that we should treat upon this subject in all the different parts of it, within the compass of our circular letter.

If we consider it, first, as an *immanent act of the divine will*, from eternity, in which, the elect were given to Christ, under the relation and character of sons, and children; standing in an eternal and indissoluble bond of union, and relation to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the first born among many brethren, Rom. viii. 29. *Jehovah* considering them as sons in his predestination of them, Eph. i. 5. And on which very account he sends the spirit of his son into their hearts, to witness the truth of their adoption, and to enable them to plead it, by calling God their father, Gal. iv. 6. He considers them as sons in every condition, even when at the greatest distance from him, as well as when called by his grace. See Isa. xliii. 6. and John xi. 52. This appears by the reasons of Christ's incarnation, because "the children" "were partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took, " part of the same." Heb. ii. 14. We being, in covenant, the sons, and daughters of the Lord Almighty, 2 Cor. vi. 18. It was necessary, that Christ, our elder brother, should wear the same nature with us. If we consider these things, we may well cry, "Behold, what manner " of love the father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called " the sons of God"! 1 John. iii. 1. To be a son, is more than to be
a saint,

a saint, as one observes; How highly ought the children of God, then, to think of this great privilege. Yet, we are not to consider ourselves to be sons in that sense, in which our Lord Jesus Christ is said to be the son of God: he is God's own son; his proper son; the son of his nature; his *only* begotten son; John i. 18. We are his adopted sons; adopted into his family, by an act of special grace, and favour, and are in such a relation to Christ, as to be heirs, and joint heirs with him, Rom. viii. 17. And the father is said to love us, as he loves Christ himself, John xvii. 23. If these things were not recorded in the scriptures, we should think them too great, and too good to be true.

But if we consider this doctrine, secondly, as *God's act in time*, manifesting, and making known our adoption, by sending his holy spirit, as a spirit of adoption into our hearts, crying Abba father, Rom. viii. 15. Gal. iv. 6. it will appear to be marvellous grace indeed! This is that new name, that none knows but he who receives it, Rev. ii. 17. This is that peculiar spirit, which is called the spirit of his son, Gal. iv. 6. That spirit, which the son of God enjoyed under his dolorous sufferings, and on which familiar term he lays so peculiar an emphasis, in his agony in Gethsemane's garden. See Mark xiv. 36.—This is that spirit of adoption which is opposed to a spirit of *bondage*, Rom. viii. 15. It frees the soul from the slavish fear of hell, in proportion as it is received. It opens a divine communication between God and the soul. It gives a spiritual turn to the affections. It makes duty easy and pleasant, and considers it as a privilege. It reconciles to the cross of Christ. It subjects the crooked and stubborn temper of our minds to God's sovereign pleasure, not so much to talk of it, as to exemplify the power of it in our temper and conduct. It fills us with unspeakable love to the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. It makes us willing to do, and suffer any thing for him that he requires, and commands. It fills us with love to the brethren. It begets an esteem for the ministers, and servants of Christ. A high regard for ordinances. A profound respect for the doctrines of the gospel. And a sincere attachment to the scriptures of truth which contain these things. The *spirit of bondage* is reverse to all this. So that we may see the excellency of the *spirit of adoption* by *contrasting* it with its opposite. All which will appear from the following considerations.

1st. The spirit of adoption is attended with *true saving faith*,
 " For

"For we are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus," Gal. iii. 26. that is, manifested and declared to be so; for those who receive Christ, have power or privilege to become the sons of God, even those who believe on his name. See John i. 12. This true saving faith realizes Christ in all his benefits; brings them home to our souls, and makes them our own: it introduces a freedom and intercourse with God himself, by claiming our relation as sons, pleading it in a way of believing; but more especially when the saints are sealed with the holy spirit of promise, which is after they believe, they have then the earnest of their inheritance, Eph. i. 13, 14. That inheritance they are entitled to as adopted sons, and which they have a more clear and satisfactory view of than before, which is ascertained to their souls by the spirit of God, as the spirit of adoption. Now the want of this leaves a man like a "slave beneath the throne." Nothing but the whip can keep him in any tolerable degree of awe; and if the whip be out of sight, his religion will be superficial; nor will the precious truths of God, ever fasten on his soul, to produce any gracious fruits; because he considers the doctrines of the gospel, expressed at the head of our letter, as matters of opinion only, which he has no objection to, but not as matters of faith received by the spirit of God, as a spirit of adoption, into the soul of a true believer. Now this is the reason why some think, that truth believed, however good in itself, is not sufficient to influence to a virtuous and pious conduct, or to regulate the spirits, and tempers of professors. Not considering, that *sanctification of the spirit*, and *belief of the truth*, are cemented together, see 2 Thes. ii. 13. and that Christ says, John xvii. 17. "*sanctify them through thy truth*." If therefore there be a deficiency in our conduct, there is a deficiency in our faith. Men act according to what they really think, and believe, though not always according to what they profess. If a man has received the spirit of adoption into his soul, his conduct will be upright, because he has received the *love of the truth* contrary to those mentioned in 2 Thes. ii. 10. who are said not to receive it in this manner; all such will be critically, and ingeniously wicked under the highest profession of morality: and it has been remarked, that the grossest falls of professors have arisen from those who have seemed the most scrupulous, which can be accounted for on no other ground, than the want of that faith, by which we are manifestly known to be the adopted children of God; which will lead us further to observe,

adly. That the spirit of adoption, as opposed to a legal spirit, is always attended with *true and genuine holiness*. Those who are privileged to become the sons of God by adoption, receive such a spiritual birth, as lies at the foundation of all those holy, and spiritual actings of the soul, which they are enabled to put forth, under the divine influences of that same blessed spirit, who is the author of them. So that they may be truly said to be "born of God," John i. 13. And have such immortal principles formed in their souls by the same spirit, that forbid them to love, cherish, or take any delight in sin. In this sense, "the sons of God are led by the spirit of God," Rom. viii. 14. which spirit, is a *spirit of holiness*, Rom. i. 4. and always leads to that which is strictly so. If they were led only by their own spirit, they would be like other men; but this elevates them to the noble character of children, heirs, and sons of God! and an inspired apostle thinks this a good argument against sin, when he writes to the people of God, that they sin not, he speaks to them under the endearing character of children, little children, "my little children," their standing in such a relation to God, as their covenant God and father, and to his ministers as their spiritual fathers, are strong incentives to a truly gracious soul, to persevere in holiness of heart, lip, and life. If a child of God under temptation doubts his sonship or adoption, he is injured in that which is the very soul, and sinew of all his obedience; therefore, it is not to be wondered at, that Satan struck so hard at Christ himself in this matter, with his cruel *If thou be the son of God!* Matt. iv. 6. So far as Satan may be permitted to prevail against the adopted sons of God, with his cruel *ifs*, so far he prevails to weaken that spring which stimulates the saints to all gracious, holy, and pious actions. Now, no legalist has such a spring to weaken. The principles and motions that induce him to an outward walk, and conduct, are very different; they all center in self. The spirit of adoption is a blessing of the covenant of grace. It is one of the things of Christ, which the holy spirit is said to shew to us. See John xvi. 14, 15. but the Holy Ghost, will never abuse his charge, by shewing such things as these to the legalist, as such, to feed his pride, and vanity, and establish his self-righteousness; therefore, such a one can never be holy, whatever pretention he may make; because he has not that which is the spring and source of all holiness, viz. the spirit we have now been describing. Which will lead us,

3dly, To shew, that this blessed spirit of adoption, as opposed to a spirit of bondage, is attended with *true humility and real dignity*. Humility and dignity, pride and meanness go together. A child, an heir, cannot forget, that he is no more a servant, (or one of a servile spirit) but a son, Gal. iv. 7. Such an idea entertained in a gracious heart, under the influences of the Holy Ghost, will produce dignity, and propriety of conduct; and will be a security against every base, vile, and unworthy action. And at the same time, it will keep such a person humble, and low in his own eyes, because he knows that his adoption is a sovereign act of discriminating grace, and that there is no room left for boasting. He does glory, it is true, but not like the proud man, who glories in himself, but like the humble man, who glories only in the Lord, 1 Cor. 31. This was the case with the poor prodigal, he had a sense of dignity, in the depth of his poverty, he could not forget that he had a tender, and an indulgent father, who was truly his father, notwithstanding he had been an undutiful son towards him; he does not think lightly of this relation to his father, nor does he suppose that his miserable situation would have any weight with his father, independent of this endearing relation; but is determined to plead this, as the first, and principal thing, by using the appellation of father, before he proceeds to make any confessions, or ask any favour. This true dignity of spirit is peculiar to God's adopted sons. If the prodigal had never thought of this relation, he had continued with his swine, to his dying day. Now in this man, we have a striking instance of true humility, though a son, he does not think himself worthy of any such character, or relation; which is strictly true of all the adopted children of God. Yea, he wishes to be made as one of the hired servants: but this plea is not to be admitted, the father prevents his making it, by calling for the best robe, &c. See Luke xv. 18, 22. Our covenant God, and father, will always make a proper distinction between children, and servants; however forward some of his children may appear to be, yet he has other ways of chastising them, than by disinheriting them, and making them no otherwise than hired servants. But those who are not the adopted sons of God, have a very different father, whose spirit they imbibe, and are the very image of him, for they are of him, even of their father the devil, for they do his works, and imbibe his spirit; now, this is a spirit of pride, and meanness, in opposition to what we have been describing: pride, in that they scorn, and reject the sovereign grace
of

of God, which discriminates his sons, and heirs from other men, because it is inconsistent with those haughty notions they entertain of their own sufficiency; meanness, in that they can make themselves subservient to the wills, and humours of their fellow worms, - rather than regard the sole will and pleasure of that God, who is capable of filling their souls, and making them completely happy in himself. No, they cannot regard this God as their father, because they have a father who is not in heaven, but a father whose appointed residence is in hell ! John viii. 44. Awful as this may seem, it is true. Nor can such ever arise to any higher spirit than this, who never received the spirit of adoption. Again,

4thly. This blessed spirit of adoption, as opposed to a spirit of bondage, is attended with unaffected, and undissembled *love to the brethren*. All who are born of God, or born of the spirit, as a spirit of adoption, "love not only him that begot, but him also who "is begotten of him," see 1 John v. 1. There is a stronger, and nearer tie of relationship between two adopted sons of God, than there is between any natural relationship sustained in this life; for the grave dissolves all of this kind, but neither death, nor the grave can dissolve the relation that subsists between two adopted sons and heirs of God. There may, it is true, be very strong religious attachment between persons making profession of the same faith with ourselves, without any thing of the spirit of adoption; and there may be some works of mercy, and charity performed in a religious way on this account, without this excellent spirit we are now speaking of; but it all centers in self, and is the offspring of the spirit of bondage. We naturally love our dear selves, and consequently we love those who love us, which is peculiar to the vilest, and lowest of characters, see Matt. v. 46. And this may be the case under a very high profession of sanctity; hence what bitter envyings and strife, are sometimes found among those who make the highest pretensions to religion ! The truth of the matter is this : self was at the bottom of all their love, and self is now at the bottom of all their hate. Not so the adopted sons of God, for though they may unhappily disagree, and grieve each other; yet there is such a bond of union, and such a firm cementing of their hearts and affections together, under the influence of this spirit of adoption, that he must be a very ignorant man in divine things, who cannot see something of the workings of



this excellent, and godlike spirit, in some of their warmest contentions. The truth is, two adopted sons can understand one another, having received the same spirit; but an adopted son, and a legalist are as barbarians to each other. It is the principle upon which the adopted sons of God act in their works of mercy and charity towards their brethren, that Christ will take so much notice of at the great judgment day; because he considers these works done towards his brethren, as done to himself, Matt. xxv. 40. It is true, these adopted sons lay no great stress upon those works of theirs, for it seems, they had forgot them: on the contrary, the legalists lay so great a stress upon their works, that they challenge Christ himself to point out wherein they had been deficient in any part of them, ver. 44. What! legalists never perform works of mercy and charity? Yea, they have done many mighty works, and these are none of the least: yea, they have sometimes (notwithstanding all their covetousness) suffered themselves to be defrauded of their property to a large amount by deceivers, to the great injury of themselves and families; though they have greatly slighted the real saints, and people of God, at the same time: and at other times, they have relieved the adopted sons of God, as well as other people, when they have come in their way; but never as adopted children, under the influence of the spirit of adoption; and unless we could conceive, that there was so much merit in the act of relieving a distressed object as such, as to deserve eternal glory and blessedness, we can never suppose it will meet with any such approbation of Christ, as that which is directed to himself alone, which legalists never can attain to.— Therefore, Christ says, “Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me,” ver. 45. Whatever the legalist may be said to have done, he never did it as unto Christ; he could as soon make a world as do such a thing as this. Whatever he did, he did it to himself, either for his own pleasure, or to procure eternal life and happiness. There can be no love to an adopted son, but as we receive the same spirit with him, and such acts as arise from this, and no other, will meet with Christ’s approbation another day: further, this blessed spirit of adoption, as opposed to a spirit of bondage, is

gthly, The only principle that can *restore a backsliding child* from a state of declension in religion, and secure him from such a defection in

in the same, as would issue in a shameful apostacy ; which sometimes happens to the great reproach of the truth, and the ways of God ; for be it remembered “ he who is only a servant, and not a son, abideth “ not in the house for ever,” John viii. 35. When such apostatize they manifestly shew, they never had the spirit of a son, but only that of a servant, they were strangers in Christ’s family, they were “ de- “ tained before the Lord, like Doeg the Edomite,” 1 Sam. xxi. 7. They are always deceitful, and sometimes mischievous among the children ; till either death, or their apostacy turn them out of doors. Not so the adopted sons of God, for though they may fall, and some- times grievously, so as to need a second conversion, like Peter, Luke xxii. 32. Yet never to need a second regeneration ; the holy spirit works upon that same principle wrought in their souls when they were first regenerated, and does not form any other ; they know, also what spirit they received when they were first brought to cry Abba father, and it is on this principle the holy spirit works their restora- tion, and recovery, as is manifest from the manner in which they are addressed in their backsliding state, “ as dear sons, and pleasant “ children,” Ju. xxxi. 20. And where the Lord himself seems to reason with himself, how he should put such as these among the chil- dren ; he resolves the difficulty by saying, They should call him fa- ther, and this should be security for their not turning away from him in future. See Jer. iii. 19. Children are to be treated as children, slaves as slaves. If saints ever see the evil nature of sin, it is under the influence of the spirit of adoption. If God says, “ return, ye “ backsliding children ;” their answer is, “ behold, we come unto “ thee,” Jer. iii. 22. It is then they repent, smite upon their thigh, and are ashamed and confounded before the Lord, Jer. xxxi. 19.— And this is the best security for their conduct in future. Both before their backsliding, and after their recovery from such a state, “ they “ follow the Lord, as dear children,” Eph. v. 1. which the legalist, as such, never does at any time : further, this blessed spirit of adop- tion, as opposed to a spirit of bondage, does

6thly, and lastly, Discover itself in enabling those who have re- ceived it, to *trust their covenant God*, and father with all their *tempo- ral concerns*, and affairs, in regard to the things of this world. The adopted sons of God have their afflictions, of a temporal, as well as of a spiritual nature ; otherwise they would be bastards, and not sons.

sons. See Heb. xii. 7, 8. But they consider that their heavenly father knows that they have need of temporal mercies, Matt. vi. 32. they therefore refer themselves to his wise disposal in these matters, whilst the Esau's of this world, live by their wits, their quiver and their bow; the adopted children live by faith in regard to temporal, as well as spiritual concerns. Their temporal mercies are to them, as one expresses it, "Isaacs, sons of laughter." They come in an unexpected way and manner. They see God in them, and taste of the sweetness of the promises in the enjoyment of them.— They are to them spiritual mercies, though the things themselves are no other than temporal concerns. But the legalist's heart is swollen with pride, in the reception of these blessings, and overwhelmed with sorrow in the want of them; such a sorrow that works death, 2 Cor. vii. 10.

Now brethren, we wish you to enjoy this divine, and heaven-born spirit of adoption, in opposition to what we have now been contrasting, as contrary to it. Then we shall bring forth fruit, not to ourselves, but to God. Then we shall know, not only what the sons of God enjoy in this life, but shall have a taste of those pleasures which are reserved for us in another, and better state; according to the words of an inspired apostle, "Beloved now are we the sons of God, " and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know, that " when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him " as he is," John iii. 2. To whom be glory for ever! Amen.

Signed, on behalf of the Assembly, by the Moderator,

WILLIAM VIDLER.